Things to Do in Fort Davis

Set high in the breathtaking Davis Mountains in far West Texas, Fort Davis is home to awe-inspiring landscapes and an abundance of ways to enjoy the outdoors. This scenic destination, with the coolest average summer temperatures in the state, is a destination for nature lovers, mountain bikers, birding enthusiasts, stargazers, or anyone looking to relax and unwind. Start your next adventure in the Lone Star State by checking out the following things to do in Fort Davis.

Step Back in Time at the Fort Davis National Historic Site

Find yourself back in the middle of the 19th century as you explore the Fort Davis National Historic Site. Established as a long line of forts from San Antonio to El Paso in 1854, Fort Davis was a U.S. Army base that played a key role in protecting travelers heading to the American Southwest. The troops stationed...
here were involved in the Indian Wars, ultimately playing an integral role in shaping the country into what it is today.

Today, Fort Davis is one of the best-preserved military bases from this era. Walk the grounds and you’ll see the commanding officers and lieutenants’ quarters, enlisted men’s barracks, officers’ quarters, hospital, and commissary, all of which have been restored and refurnished to appear as they did while the fort was active. Then get a close-up view of the ruins of 100 structures, including the cavalry stables and post headquarters. After touring the fort, head to the museum where you can learn about the military post’s history and about those who served here, including Henry O. Flipper, the first African American graduate of West Point.

The Fort Davis National Historic Site preserves an important chapter of American history. Visit and you’ll uncover it for yourself.

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**Ride Horses at Prude Ranch**

There’s nothing that compares to the gentle thrill of riding through the Davis Mountains, over its babbling streams, under its bright skies, on the back of a friendly horse. Prude Ranch offers horseback trail rides through its breathtaking landscape all year long. On the tour, your guide will show you the way as you observe wildlife, native plants, and the region’s history. Trail riders must be at least six years old, but for those five and under there are “Buckaroo rides” around the corral for future cowboys and cowgirls to get a feel for the saddle.

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**Stargaze at McDonald Observatory**

The giant telescopes of the McDonald Observatory sit beneath some of the state’s darkest skies high upon Mount Locke and Mount Fowlkes of the Davis Mountains, providing out-of-this-world stargazing. Visiting this observatory should top your Texas travel bucket list.

One of the main attractions at the McDonald Observatory is the Hobby-Eberly Telescope, one of the largest optical telescopes in the world. Plan ahead and reserve your spot at a McDonald Observatory Star Party and Twilight Program (most Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday evenings throughout the year), when there will be a theater presentation about our night sky followed by an outside gathering for a tour of the constellations and a chance to observe stars and planets through large telescopes.

Although you can only stargaze at night, it’s still worthwhile to come here when the sun is out. Not only is the drive to the observatory spectacular, there are daytime programs and solar viewings as well.
Spot Rare Birds

Fort Davis and the Davis Mountains reside within a major migratory path, making it a paradise for birdwatching enthusiasts. In fact, it’s known as the Hummingbird Capitol of Texas due to having more hummingbirds than anywhere else in the Lone Star State. Get the most out of your birding adventure by visiting the Davis Mountains Hummingbird Festival held every other August. You can see these magnificent little creatures up close at the banding sessions and come to understand how special they are at lectures from top ornithologists and birding authors.

Check more birds off your list at the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute, where you may see dusky-capped flycatchers, golden eagles, common black-hawks, Montezuma quails, painted redstarts, and Grace’s warblers. Hang out in the bird blind at a peaceful retreat for many winged creatures. Be sure to print a checklist of the birds of Davis Mountains State Park before your trip to Fort Davis.

Visit a Vineyard Near Fort Davis

Think of Texas wine and your first thought likely leads you to the Hill Country. Yet Fort Davis happens to reside within its own distinct American Viticultural Area (AVA) that’s characterized by its Mediterranean-like climate and volcanic soils that are akin those found in Central and Northern California. Taste the region’s reds and whites at Chateau Wright, Blue Mountain Trail Vineyard, producers of the award-winning Jack Rabbit Red made with 70-precent grenache and 30-percent Mourvèdre grown at the vineyard. Alta Marfa has a vineyard nearby as well, and though they’re not regularly open to the public, you can sign up for notifications when its wine is available. For a globe-spanning wine selection paired with some fine dining, sit down for a meal in the cozy dining room at the Blue Mountain Bistro, located in the heart of Fort Davis’ downtown area.

Take a Hike or Go Mountain Biking

Hiking the beautiful Davis Mountains is one of the most popular things to do in Fort Davis. Loop together hike and bike trails at Davis Mountain State Park for a full day exploring the great outdoors. As you traverse the Skyline Drive Trail, Indian Lodge Trail, Limpia Creek Trail, Sheep Pen Canyon Loop, and the Old CCC Trail, you’ll observe ancient volcanic mountains, fragrant sumac, torry yucca, mule deer, and acorn woodpeckers.
Check the calendar of ranger-led events like full moonrise viewings, guided bird watching trips, and hikes with rescue dogs. At night, camp under the stars or stay at the adobe Indian Lodge with fireplaces and a pool with a view of the surrounding mountains.